

It's Hard To Figure Potential Cost Of Replacing Gate Latches

By Monte Noelke

9-2-65

Page 8

MERTZON — Ever since we got news that ranches out here in the short grass country would, in time, be manned by hands working either for union scale or under the minimum wage act, I have been pondering this development.

Though I've put in a good deal of time figuring the cost of various jobs and projects around the place, I've accomplished very little.

Oh, I did calculate that if weather conditions were perfect (cloudy) and the temperature 65 degrees, we could wean the lambs over on the brush side of the ranch for a mere \$6 per head. But if it happened to be, say, 95 degrees and sunny, and we had to pass through a small patch of 14-inch broomweeds about two miles long, the total cost of working the lambs would be closer to what man thinks of when he contemplates divorce settlements or taxes than what it costs to work sheep.

One thing I got done was to list all the various things we've been assigned to do during my 15-year tenure on this operation. This was most profitable. I discovered that we had put off enough work to occupy all the able bodied men in Northern Mexico for at least a year. In that time they might catch up with their chores if they were not inclined to take off two full days for the Sabbath; did not observe all the independence days of all U. N. Member nations; and were about to give up celebrating all the official holidays of every known religion in the world.

But in the case of more normal hands, and this is the only type I have had many dealings with lately, it might be time for another World Fair in New York before we become current in their work.

Anyway, I spent days speculating on what life would be like under a union contract, or governed by the wage-and-hour boys. Actually I couldn't progress very far along these lines for wondering what organization would absorb my occupational group (windshield cowboys). Would it be the Actor's Guild? After all, many of us rarely-mounted drovers have carried a rope for year with the sole intention of acting the part of a cowboy — not to yank the thing down and rope an animal.

Some unions obviously wouldn't have us. For example the plumbers' union wouldn't touch us with a 36-inch wrench; it is common knowledge that the father of cross-threading was an early day cowboy.

Nor would the machinists group care for a group of bungling men who, to save their lives, couldn't replace a sparkplug wire correctly.

It's difficult to envision ranch workers operating under conditions common in other industries.

It simply isn't plausible to imagine some smooth labor chieftain or a well-trained hourly wage official picking up a phone in Ft. Worth or Denver and hearing a report that a man he was representing in West Texas was madder than a game hen because a cow was dead within 40 steps of the saddle horse and the boss hadn't even taken the first steps to have the carcass removed.

Or the same type gent being awakened at 6 a.m. by some hand who demanded a ranch be picketed because the cook had made the biscuits out of water and the foreman had dealt him an old cold-backed sap sucker of a horse that was practically certain to unload him and his rigging to boot.

The harder I tried, the less I could see any chance of a union using one of us herders for any purpose at all.

Surely they wouldn't be interested in a percentage of our salary; even if the hourly wage soared to \$1.75 an hour, some way or another we'd manage to be overdrawn at the bank. The probability of a union collector getting so much as a dime would be pretty slim.

I took a final look at my figures. They proved that, under the hourly wage structure, a horseshoe gate latch could be installed for as little as \$9. Also that four such shoes could be tacked on a well broke hours for \$25 to \$30 per setting. Then I tossed the entire study in the trash.

Much as I hate to admit it, I'm beginning to doubt the wisdom of Congress in planning to put us mechanized but sometimes mounted drovers in with the rest of the labor force. I've even had doubts that the unions really have our best interests at heart. Perhaps they want us aboard their ship only to further their mission, which is to unionize the country's entire labor supply.

With these thoughts, I've abandoned the matter, deciding to accord it with the same amount of action that has been given the long list of unfinished tasks that have accumulated during the past 15 years.